

**Diana:** Good morning Ajay and welcome to the first Fire side chat session for Women Connect Cluster one. I would like to introduce you to some ladies in the meeting. They would remain on mute as this is just a one to one conversation. So, we have got a combination of some HR representatives, we have some ladies from India group under your ROU and we also have the community leads from the UK, Ireland and South Africa regions. Ok, so the purpose of the talk today is to get your personal view of how you feel about the Women Connect initiative and what it means to you in essence. The meeting will be recorded and will be shared with other members of UK, Ireland and South Africa regions later on in the month. Welcome and I must say thank you very much, it is an honor to be able to speak to you. I know that you are my line manager. You are very, very busy, but it is a great privilege to be able to talk to you in this in-person way and to get your feedback one on one.

**Ajay:** First and foremost, a good morning to all of you and good afternoon to the team in India. So yes, I am looking forward to having this conversation. I know it is a subject which is making a lot of waves across the world so I think it's something where if I can contribute my 2 cents, I look forward to doing that.

**Diana:** Great, so the first question is how do you see your role in the diversity and inclusion initiatives across the regions?

**Ajay:** Ok, interesting, I think the way I look at it is, diversity and inclusion is a journey which organizations do undertake, and something which does not really happen overnight. And I think it's important to understand that while we are talking here today, in the perspective of diversity in terms of gender, but it is not about gender only. It is one of the key areas that we are look at within HCL, but I think it is also important to understand the diversity includes other factors like religion, race, ethnicity, etc. and when you have this whole diverse mix within your own organization, it becomes very important to have an inclusive workforce and where everyone has a voice and the freedom to be who they are. And because of this they are treated fairly and given equal opportunities. I think it is all about, as I say, within the HR world, I think there is a big initiative which right now I'm hearing and reading, it's all about diversity, inclusion and belongingness and I think it's belongingness that makes each individual feel accepted for who they are and it's very important to understand that.

Within the HCL world I can clearly see that there is a clear mandate at L1 and L2 levels to have a diversified workforce. And this is something which is very critical, and we have been driving this initiative with our DNI team and regularly even measuring performances within our own teams.

As I understand, we have this year, 2% improvement to be shown on our E4+ workforce to be gender diversified and 1% overall from a workforce perspective and I am very proud to state that within the UK&I workforce, we led it from the front last year in FY'19-20 and we stood out or rather exceeded our targets in terms of meeting the targets for our diversity and inclusion numbers. It is something that I'm proud of, and it's something that I'm constantly goading my teams to drive further and drive the right behaviors within the team to do the right things the right way. And as I said, it is all about providing equal opportunities to all for growth and rather not basing it only on gender.

And a couple of things I would really like to touch here is that while we talk about gender, race, religion, ethnicity, all that is fine in the DNI perspective, but another one of the key things that we need to include today is the whole inclusion of pride and the LGBTQ community. I am pretty proud of the fact that the DNI Team has made some significant progress on this front by not only creating an environment, where they can express themselves and also provide information and education to others to provide that environment.

Another area which we should also be focused on is this whole area while we have created campuses today which are disabled friendly, but it's also important to understand that we should be hiring more and more people with disabilities in different roles within our span to get them deployed in the different roles that we can and make them part of our inclusive workforce setting, that is something we should be looking at and as a leader, my role in this whole thing is to support all these developmental initiatives that we have within our system for DNI.

For example, ASCEND, Stepping-stones, etc., which are there, and I sincerely request all my lady workforce members to enroll themselves on and make sure that they use these opportunities to drive their career growth going forward.

**Diana:** Ok so you find very effective, these career development programs?

**Ajay:** Yeah, I mean, they seem to be doing the right things. I am sure we can talk about it because I have very clearly seen that it seems to be working.

**Diana:** OK, that is great. Lovely thank you. The second question was how can you enable other stakeholders to own or promote this initiative and address the challenges encountered by women to rise within the organization?

**Ajay:** As I said, one is, it is the initiative that the individual here- he or she has to take within the fraternity that we're talking about the lady workforce here. You are being provided with equal opportunities and I think they should make the best use of the opportunities to grow within the organization, it goes without saying. But more importantly from within our own teams, the way I see it and the way I am driving it is I am encouraging all my male employees to actively participate in some of those women connect network sessions where you can be a part of, or a guest speaker in one of those sessions or conduct some workshops if you want. Because I completely believe that its only by understanding the alternate perspective or the alternate thought process can we learn and encourage each other, I think it's important to understand that. And more importantly, I think even people at our level and direct leaders that you have within your own team, every individual needs to be part of, and taking an active participation in the learning modules like the inclusion lab sessions for example. And there are other training opportunities too which can help in creating and fostering a culture around diversity. I think that is important and that is important to drive this whole thing because you need to embed this as a culture within the organization rather than just an activity to be carried out where you are being measured upon your KPP. I think that is very important to understand that.

**Diana:** The changes you mean?

**Ajay:** Absolutely. It is a change of mindset that needs to happen and the change of thought process that needs to happen. And last but not the least, it is important, while you are encouraging people to do, to give credit where it is due, making sure that the people are seen, heard, and valued. I think that is very important to happen.

**Diana:** Where do you feel there is a gap in the market where HCL can promote the engagement and recruitment of more females?

**Ajay:** The way I see it, we know we are in the IT industry, and one of the key inputs that industry is the STEM graduates and we have seen it worldwide that very clearly the uptake of STEM within the lady workforces is typically not more than 25-30% unfortunately, and that is something which really needs to be driven hard for us to say from our business perspective, for this is on the overall concept of diversity altogether.

But I think what is important and which I feel proud of, is the fact that HCL as an organization – HCL Corporation has taken the initiative to build those initiatives where we started engaging with kids right from the grassroot levels, right from primary school to secondary schools and universities. Look at the work that is been done by the HCL Foundation, the Vidya Gyan, the Shiv Nadar University - we are creating a workforce today where we have boys and girls being provided equal opportunities to grow themselves up and come up the ladder to make themselves available to be a part of the workforce worldwide- that is a great initiative and that's number one.

Number 2, I think what we really need to understand is the hiring that we do, we must make sure that more and more hiring of a diversified workforce should happen. And that is something which we are consciously pushing now across the board, across the levels which we are doing. And we have started seeing those results very clearly coming there and once these teams come within HCL, once these women force joins, you have numerous structured programs like the ASCEND, Stepping-stones etc. which are there for the lady Workforce to embrace and build their future support & grow their careers according to that.

**Diana:** I do love the idea that the underprivileged or the non-privileged get the opportunity to come into the organization and the program.

**Ajay:** Absolutely that goes without saying. You have so many green shoots who have really proved themselves up. In fact, there was one of those examples which I recently saw, one of the kids of Vidya Gyan kids who actually excelled in the Class 12 exams which is our A levels out here and he was given 100% scholarship to join the University in New York. I mean that boy came in from such an underprivileged background, but it is thanks to the Foundation which really enabled that to happen.

**Diana:** Fantastic, that is great! So, question #4, can you share some experiences you encountered during this initiative as a means of motivation?

**Ajay:** I think motivation as a concept - there are two ways of looking at it. This is all about individual as well as the whole organization that we are building in, and personally I have seen very clearly within my own team, I have clearly seen a lot of women starting to rise and they have taken as I say the bull by the horn. They have taken charge of their careers and they are driving, and I can clearly see the impact they are making for us as a business. The fact that I have quite a few ladies today as a part of my team who have credited themselves and stood out and raised their hand and said you know what, I need the next onsite opportunity because it is not about somebody else getting it. I need the next

onsite opportunity, and we have provided those opportunities for a few of them and very clearly, I can see they have made their mark in front of the customer. The way they have managed the relationship with the customer and mind you, some of them have graduated to being senior managers, performing senior roles and they are managing the customers now and the fact more importantly, the team below them looks up to them and respects them very clearly, that yes, there is a leader that I can trust and that is what it is.

As I said, performance wise I am an individual. Personally, I do not believe there is anything different from a boy or a girl for a performance to happen. In fact, I would say very clearly that I think the opportunities and challenges that some of our women folk have is much more than even our guys.

And I'm now going to cite a very personal example, it is something which I'm very proud of. I can take my own personal example of my own mother, and my mother in 1960s in India when imagine how many of the mothers would have even been brought up thinking about going to college and educational and here was my mother who was a state rank topper in civil engineering and she did her Masters from the Indian Institute of Science, one of the premier institutes at that point in time.

And then she grew up to take up the job in, people in Delhi who are on the call can understand, the Delhi Electric Supply Wing, which is the Delhi Vidyut Board, it used to be called in those days and she rose up to being the executive engineer of that organization. So, for me that is something which I'm very proud of and the fact that I've seen both my parents, helping out each other, it all goes in the personal level, right? I mean it is all about the values that you're brought up in terms of all these perspectives being embedded into you. I personally believe that the way I've seen both the partners contributing, both my dad and Mom helping out each other, even me for that matter, even when I was a child. I was the only child, and the way I used to help them out when I grew up in terms of how to manage the house when my mother was away for work or whatever it is. So, it was something that I grew up with, it just doesn't matter whether it is a boy or a girl, it doesn't matter at all.

I do not want to take it beyond, but I can talk about my own grand-mom, way back in 1930s, pre-independence era, she was a teacher in history, in an English school way back in Dehradun. And imagine those times!

So, it is there in the family and I can clearly see, when you grow up with those values, so for me it is very natural, I don't see any difference whether it's a boy or a girl at all. Everybody is equal, everybody is same, and everybody has got an equal role to play and I think you have got to give the opportunities fairly and squarely. And then it is as I say, the world is your oyster to perform.

**Diana:** What I would say is that with women coming into the organization in more senior roles or L1 roles, they tend to bring a different dynamic with the same output. But the dynamics may change in terms of how you approach logical thinking, or soft skills are brought in to change the conversation. Those skills can enhance, not saying it men don't have those skills, but yeah, a different dynamic comes into play.

**Ajay:** Absolutely. I think there is two ways about it. I think it again goes back to the point I made earlier - It is all about how you work along with each other and hear the different perspective. I think it is all about learning from each other and encouraging each other. And I think that's where it is for this whole thing to be successful.

**Diana:** Ok, Question#5, I get this question a lot, by the way, so it's not a personal question, so gender pay gap is a popular topic in the media. How has HCL addressed this?

**Ajay:** OK, I know this is a topic which is really making the rounds in the western media a lot more than India, but I think from my perspective at least whatever I've done in my 10 years with HCL and prior to that the 20 years in my earlier organizations, I have worked across multinationals in India and I have worked in leadership roles prior to coming to HCL too and I think within HCL I can very clearly say that we have very strict guidelines for equal pay for equal work. So, I think it's important to understand that and then employees' salary is clearly based at the time of hiring on the role and the skill of the employee that is being hired rather than gender. So, I think that is very clear and there is no such thing as being discriminated here or anything of that sort.

I think it also goes back to the point that we have had our scores under tensions pretty high within the organization, demonstrating that we are the employer of choice, and I think one of the results that I heard from one of my HR folks earlier, was that we today have more than 90% of our workforce returning back even after maternity, so I think that clearly explains why ladies would love to continue to work for us, that's something as an organization we have started making the difference for them and a whole lot of credit goes to the DNI team to creating that environment and creating the culture within the organization to drive that, to make sure that these ladies can come back and work. Maternity

leave is anyway given, I think there are certain additional leaves being provided for the employee to settle down during this so I think it's important to make sure that it is done and driven more and more. And more importantly, I think it's also to understand that all our pay scales and everything are regularly audited to ensure that there are no anomalies, so I don't think there is something that I have ever seen, I don't expect to see also.

**Diana:** Also, the pay gap is not always about actual salaries, it also about the benefits, you have flexible working etc.

**Ajay:** Flexible working, which is to have those additional leaves and everything for the lady workforce is already there, that's where I'm saying it's already there in the system and I would see more and more happening on that area.

**Diana:** Yes, great #6, the final question. With the recent announcement of Mr. Shiv Nadar Ex-Chairman stepping down and his daughter Roshni becoming his successor, how do you see HCL changing in the next five years?

**Ajay:** Yes, I think Shiv Nadar has been the doyen of the IT industry in India. So if you want to look at it, his contribution to IT industry is invaluable and to take an organization from a garage to where it is today, a \$10 billion organization, speaks volume of his contribution - and the fact that he has been a contributor to developing the whole industry itself is, as I said, very clearly, an invaluable contribution there.

But I'm sure Roshni has been groomed by him and the team to sort of step into those big shoes that she has to fill in, and I'm very confident that with the way things are, with Mr. Nadar still supporting her, I'm very confident that Roshni will succeed in the new role and the entire team in HCL will rally behind her to support her and make her successful, and I think that's very clear. As I said, I don't have any doubts in my mind that she will definitely fit in into the boots nicely, but obviously it will take some time for her to process, but I'm very confident that she would do that.

**Diana:** OK, well thank you very much Ajay, that's been very insightful and hopefully ladies got some takeaways from the comments made today. Enjoy the rest of your week and thank you for participating in this Fire side talk.

**Ajay:** Thank you very much for your time ladies and look forward to having a chat with you and look forward to working closely with all of you guys- to drive this initiative more and more. Let's make our workforce a truly diversified and inclusive workforce for HCL, Thank you.

**Diana:** Thank you.